



# **Natomas Oral Histories**

## **2015/027**

Oral interview of

**Vera Hurt Haines**

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*An exact transcript of this interview is not available due to a defective audiotape. The following has been reconstructed from the tape and notes taken during the interview.*

I was born on October 11, 1921, at home in Arthur, Indiana, about 50 minutes north of Evanston, Indian. My parents were Mary and Orlo Hurt. My father worked in coal mines for a short time, and then he decided there must be something better to do so he traveled to Illinois. He found work on a farm near Forest, Illinois. The owner provided a house and a share of the crop. The owner lived in the city. They raised corn, chickens, etcetera. Two years passed, and my dad was still looking for a better place to work and raise a family. He saw an ad in the Chicago paper for needed help at Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, so we proceeded to Akron, Ohio. This was a good job with good pay, but on a visit back to Winslow, Indiana, to visit my mother's parents, Ira and Matilda Russ, my grandfather gave him the idea to make a trip to California to visit his brother, Aaron Russ. Also, grandpa's second son, Marion Russ, was now living near Sacramento. They wrote many interesting stories about the prosperity in California, and we all had an invitation to come out for a visit.

Plans were made to make this trip to the "Land of Golden Opportunity." My father bought a new 1926 Ford. So on around the first week of August 1926, we began this adventure. "We" were Grandfather Ira Russ; Grandmother Matilda; my boy cousin Jerry, age 6, who was being raised by my grandparents; my mother Mary; my dad; and me. Six of us. Many roads were gravel, washboard-like, and narrow. We carried a canvas water bag hanging on the radiator to get us through the desert and for drinking. We brought food along the way at little stores but there were long stretches of road with no service stations. You really needed to plan ahead. We stayed in individual little cabins or sometimes used a tent if there was no other way. We stopped early, 4 pm, as my grandparents were old and needed to rest. We traveled Route 66. We met families along the route. People were friendly. All through Arizona and New Mexico, we saw Indians holding up their handmade wares — beads, rugs, etcetera. Also, we saw many, many little prairie dogs standing on top of their dugouts. There were not many cars then, so we saw many natural scenes. It took us 26 days in all.

Our destination was the Sacramento Valley, and Sacramento in particular, as that was where my great-uncle Aaron and his family, and Uncle Marion and his family, lived. Their home was on Powerline Road at Elverta Road. They welcomed us and proceeded to convince my father that we should find work and stay in California.

Great Uncle Aaron arrived several years earlier, found a beautiful Spanish lady, married, and had five children. His wife died, so his wife's best friend Nennie came to live with them and raised the five children as her own. Aaron was in an accident early on and ended up with a peg leg.

Uncle Marion and his family lived on a ranch at Elverta Road and Powerline Road. A lady, Clara Kruegar, owned it. She raised turkeys. Arriving in October, my family helped with the turkey plucking and selling to market for the Thanksgiving season in November. My father became acquainted with a neighbor on an adjoining ranch on Elverta Road. Mr. and Mrs. George Smith from Emporia, Kansas, bought these 50 acres of land on Elverta Road. Mr. Smith liked my father and needed a young man to help him with the ranch, so they decided to go into partnership, fifty-fifty. They provided us with a new house, livestock, and equipment on the shares. It was a good arrangement. They got along fine. We stayed there five years. Mrs. Smith was a very social lady. She was great at arranging parties and excuses to get people together. She would plan these big dinners and social events for the district. One year she planned a community Thanksgiving dinner called the Community Supper. Another event was a George Washington birthday party. All the people came dressed up. Women powdered their hair and brought cherry pies.

She arranged all these events. She had no phone, so she would drive from house to house, visit, and ask people what they would bring to eat, etcetera. They were big affairs and everyone liked participating. She organized a Sunday school, too.

I was 5 years old now and needed to be going to school. A new school building was completed in 1929 on Elkhorn Road to be called American Basin School, just in time for me to attend. The students previous to this attended school in a temporary building on the Albert White Ranch called the Turkey Shed. My mother drove me to school and picked me up after every day for a couple of years until the school district arranged to buy an old school bus. Each row of seats had an outside door. The bus driver was Tom Comstock. The school was new with big classrooms on each end with a big, big auditorium, kitchen, and all kinds of amenities. One classroom was for the 1st through 4th grades, the other 5th and 8th grades. The big auditorium was used for many events, such as Farm Bureau, 4-H Club, plays, elections, etcetera. On rainy days, the students used it for recreation, volleyball, kickball, and other athletic games. Also it was used for Sunday-morning Sunday School. It had a great piano and a young lady, Margaret Vogel, played it for dances, church, and many other occasions.

My first-grade teacher was Mrs. Phoebe Shaul. She was such a dear lady and teacher. She had no children of her own, so her students were her children. We had no kindergarten. The students who started first grade with me were Wilma Hirst, Raymond Bennett (Sonny), Edwin Willey, Iris Stahl, Dolores Ferreira, Neil Comstock, and Jack Cooper. Some students were older, more advanced, and read at a different pace, so she decided to have two groups: the Robins and the Bluebirds. The Robins, she said, were the first to come in the spring, so they would be called "first." I was a Robin. Mrs. Shaul lived up into her 90s. I kept in touch with her all those years, taking her out to lunch as long as she was able. I was invited into her home regularly as long as she lived.

The fifth- and sixth-grade teacher was Mrs. Minnie Woods. She was a good teacher, also. The two teachers would commute to Natomas from Sacramento each day. After Mrs. Woods retired, our next teacher was Miss Dorothy Haenggi. She was very young and pretty and just out of college. The older boys thought she was pretty special. They tried to play tricks on her, but she caught on right away and was a disciplinarian. There were several Portuguese families in Natomas, also two Japanese families. One Japanese family was Minor and Alice Inouye-Urikawa, the other Takeshi Hiroshi, Kay Hiroshi, Alice, and Kikuye.

My father stayed on at the Smith Ranch on Elverta Road for five years. Their ranch was divided into several parts. There was the peach orchard, pear orchard, almonds, grapes, berries, figs, and plums. The crops were alfalfa, barley, and pink beans. It was a versatile ranch and the rich soil produced great crops. They also raised pigs, chickens of all kinds, and dairy animals — Jersey, Holsteins, and Guernsey. No sheep or goats. They had two workhorses and two mules.

The cows were milked by hand in those days. The milk was poured into a separator, which was turned by hand, and this machine separated the cream from the milk. The milk (skim) was used to feed the animals, pets, etcetera, and to drink if you wanted nonfat. The cream was put into big five-gallon cans and delivered to the Golden State Creamery (at 12th and C streets) each week. A big windmill was used to pump water for household use, to water the stock, and for small irrigation for flowers and the yard. To water the crops, a big pump was used in the summertime.

After five years, my father decided he could make more money if he had a farm of his own. They found a small farm in the Roseville area, next to the Center Joint Elementary School. He had his dairy there and

some crops, but the Depression came along, prices went way down, and he let the farm go back to the owner.

Being involved with the Farm Bureau, my father met a farmer who decided he no longer was able to farm so he suggested my dad take the ranch he was giving up. The place was known as the Franks place. It was located on River Road between Elverta Road and Elkhorn. It had a nice home, good soil, and was next to the Sacramento River and levee. He farmed this until a better opportunity opened up.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Hall owned a 65-acre ranch, which they called "Dreamland Farm." Mr. Hall was the County Clerk of Sacramento. This ranch was 2 miles north of Elverta Road and not far from Riego Road. It was 3 miles north of the Elkhorn Ferry and 3 miles south of Verona. The Halls became disenchanted with the farm and thus my father was able to purchase it. My father renamed it Patoka Grove Ranch, both as a memory of their growing up near the Patoka River in Southern Indiana, and it was an old Indian burial ground. The ground was higher there and Indians always chose high ground for their burials. This soil was rich, dark and loamy. When he plowed up his fields, he would discover bones and artifacts constantly. This ranch had 26 tall oak trees near the house and barn. They were so beautiful and cool in the summer. No air conditioning was needed because of them. They acquired a dairy and sold milk to Crystal Creamery. It became a Class A dairy. The crops planted were alfalfa, grain, tomatoes, and fruit trees, etcetera. Prices were good and they together paid off the ranch. They both continued to stay on this ranch and farm it. Later, Tad Yuki was contracted to farm it while my dad needed to slow down somewhat. Eventually, he passed away and my mother moved to Rio Linda to be closer to her brothers and their families. The ranch was sold. Tad Yuki's family still farms this property, I'm told.

Back to me — I graduated from American Basin Elementary School in 1934. My classmates at that time were Marguerite Ferreira, Hiram Huffman, Neil Comstock, Manuel Rosa, and Howard Counts. Manuel Rosa was the valedictorian of our class. I needed to go to a junior high school for one year, as our high schools were 10-12 grades. I selected to go to Sutter Junior High at 18th and K streets. At first it looked as if I would need to take the small bus that went daily past our place between Nicholas and Sacramento. At the last minute I was invited to ride with the Bennetts. Ted Bennett furnished a car for his nephews, Franklin and Elwood. They in turn said they would take others including my cousin, Jewel Russ, Pearly Greenhouse, and Elgeane Lauppe. Their charge was \$5 a month for transportation. This was a good deal for all of us. Franklin drove the first year. He was going to Sacramento Junior College, and the rest of them to Sacramento High School, except for me, to Sutter Junior High. My year at Sutter Junior High was quite an experience for me. I was the only girl from my class to go on from our country school. I didn't know a single person there. Soon, I did make a few friends. At this time, I decided to go into business, not knowing what else to do. At lunchtime, my girlfriend and I walked to a hamburger place at 18th and O streets for a super burger, which cost us 50 cents. Believe it or not! We would also walk down to the Public Market at 17th and K. There was a booth where we could get all the buttermilk we could drink for another 5 cents. I did like buttermilk, so that was good.

The next year, I transferred to Sacramento High School. Transportation was still ok. I rode with the Bennetts, and since I lived the farthest, I drove the car to my place, kept it overnight, and then picked up the other passengers at their places. "Pinky" Elwood drove on into high school, as Franklin had transferred on to UC Berkeley. The following year, when I became a junior, I transferred to Grant Union High School. There was no bus for Natomas students for the fall semester, so my girlfriend and I stayed at my uncle's home in Rio Linda until the spring semester. The arrangements were an eight-passenger Buick with jump seats. Our driver was Leland Strauch, who was a senior and president of the senior class. The students were Wilma Hirst, Iris Stahl, Manuel Rosa, Curtis Cooper, and Hiram Huffman.

The following year we had a regular big bus, and students from Jefferson Elementary rode, also. I graduated from Grant in 1938. This was a great school. There was so much school spirit. Young teachers who were right out of college taught us. I remember an Albert Rodda, later to become Senator Rodda. My English teacher was Clarice Horgan. My California history teacher was really great. His name was Charles Christie. I had Betty Philpot for home economics. Every Friday afternoon, there was an assembly. George Wright played the organ for a rally — that was so much fun. George was in my graduating class, also my English class. He became famous in that he went on to San Francisco and played on the Don Lee Network for years. Then he went to New York and Chicago playing famous organs. We were so proud of our school. It was the only high school to have an organ and a swimming pool. It was featured in *Life* magazine in the '30s.

After graduation, I was pretty young, barely 16, and didn't know what I wanted to pursue as a career. I stayed out one year. Mrs. Smith, the lady whose ranch we lived on, who at one time had wanted to adopt me, asked me to stay at their home and assist her with cooking and care. She was becoming frail. I decided to do that! My father told me I should go to Sacramento Junior College for a couple of years and get my AA degree. If I still didn't know what I wanted to do, he'd send me to Upthegrove Beauty College. It was located on K street, upstairs between 8th and 9th. I took his advice and registered at SJC. While registering, I checked out the subjects taught and here was a big sign, cosmetology, the first time it was being taught at the community college. That sounded good to me. I could take requirements for graduation and get my hours in for beauty school. I liked the course so much, and had a great teacher by the name of Mrs. Sackett. I soon found out that her family owned the Upthegrove Beauty College. I graduated from that with honors.

Going back, my uncle Marion, lived in Imlay, Nevada, and while there met a fella named Harry Haines. He worked with him in that small railroad town. My uncle kept insisting that I meet this fella. In the meantime, he told Haines that he should meet his niece in Sacramento. Neither of us was very anxious to have this happen. Ha! Anyway, one day Uncle Marion brought this fella over to meet me. We had no phone at that time, so it was a surprise visit. I had my hair rolled up in curlers and no make-up. I was dressed however, as I was to drive my mother to a missionary meeting in Natomas. Well, I guess he liked what he saw. We dated after that. I lived 17 miles north of Sacramento on the Garden Highway, so he bought a car, a 1930 Model A roadster with a rumble seat. When I told him I was going to go to college, he decided he should also. Couldn't let me get ahead of him. We both attended and graduated. That summer with the suggestion and encouragement of his boss, Mr. Hill, manager of the Southern Pacific Restaurant. He signed up at the airport on Freeport Boulevard — our only airport then — to take GAA to learn to fly. He liked flying so much he signed up for the Army Air Corps, as it was called then. He was called for training in November 1941.

After graduation, I took the first available state board examination for my license for cosmetology. There were two exams, one each day, and one written and one demonstration. I passed the test. I applied for a job in downtown Sacramento. My first employment was at Andrus Beauty Shop, on 7th between K and L streets. I worked six days a week for \$12 — 24 cents was deducted for Social Security. I didn't stay there long. I saw a sign in a window on 10th street between J and K. It said Elda's Beauty Salon. I worked there for \$16 a week plus 50% commission until my fiance came home from the war, from Italy. We were married and lived happily ever after!